

# School Leadership Review

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# School Leadership Review

The international, peer-reviewed journal of the Texas Council of Professors of Educational Administration

Winter 2014

*View from the Field: How NCLB's Good Intentions of Accountability  
Damage our Educational Leaders and Our Schools*

Vance Vaughn

*Response to Accountability Policies by Principals and Teachers of Alternative Education:  
A Cross Case Analysis*

Lynn M. Hemmer

*School Counselors' Perceptions about Interventions for At-Risk Students including Grade Retention:  
Implications for School Leaders*

Bret Runge, Mary Alice Bruce and Suzanne Young

*Insight for Teacher Preparation Program Administrators: Enhancing Pre-service Educators' Intercultural  
Sensitivity and Deep Proficiency in Culturally Responsive Teaching through Short-Term Study Abroad*

Gloria Gresham, Paula Griffin, Tracy Hashun, and Vikki Boatman

*Preparing School Leaders for Special Education: Old Criticisms and New Directions*

David DeMatthews and D. Brent Edwards, Jr.

# **School Leadership Review**

Winter 2014 Volume 9 Issue 1

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## ***Accountability and Students' Needs***

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Our schools are working under many pressures often with increased expectations and less resources. These increased expectations hold administrators and teachers to high accountability standards while working with increased diverse populations of students.

In the first article, *A View from the Field: How NCLB's Good Intentions of Accountability Damage our Educational Leaders and Our Schools*, **Vance Vaughn** provides an article on the results of the high level of accountability. He shares some of the unintended consequences of high accountability.

Following this, **Lynn M. Hemmer** offers the dialogues between teachers and principals for policy implementation as a response to accountability policies for alternative education. Lynn M. Hemmer shares her article, *"Response to Accountability Policies by Principals and Teachers of Alternative Education: A Cross Case Analysis."* In it she demonstrates the importance of policy implementation and the definition of success. The responses to accountability pressures are shared from the discourse between teachers and principals.

The next article shares the importance of counselors and parents for supporting at-risk students. In *School Counselors' Perceptions about Interventions for At-Risk Students including Grade Retention: Implications for School Leaders*, **Bret Range, Mary Alice Bruce, and Suzanne Young** define at-risk factors and the engagement of counselors by the principals to meet the needs of at-risk students. They look at the interventions as described by school counselors with parent involvement as the leading intervention. Further, the interventions need to be developed for the individual needs of students. Principals are encouraged to share intervention planning responsibilities with counselors and look for ways to engage parents of at-risk students.

This is followed by an article meeting the needs of students from different cultures by teacher candidates who experience a different culture through study abroad. **Gloria Gresham, Paula Griffin, Tracey Hasbun, and Vikki Boatman** offer their article *Insight for Teacher Preparation Program Administrators: Enhancing Pre-service Educators' Intercultural Sensitivity and Deep Proficiency in Culturally Responsive Teaching through Short-Term Study Abroad*. The authors share the demands for teacher candidates to have an understanding of integrated and interdependent society. Administrators of schools need to meet the needs of a diverse population of students. Cross-cultural experiences are an effective way to prepare teachers and administrators to have a world view by studying abroad. These experiences positively impact teacher candidates' intercultural sensitivity. As administrators strive for culturally responsive teaching at their campuses, one method may be to hire candidates that had experiences in different cultures.

Finally, the next article, *Preparing School Leaders for Special Education: Old Criticisms and New Directions*, shares the importance of principal preparation programs to modify their programs to ensure more success for leaders of special education students. **David DeMatthews and Brent Edwards, Jr.** provide the importance for professors of educational administration in establishing effective and innovative principal preparation programs that produce effective school leaders. Special education is often not adequately addressed by preparation programs. The authors suggest that there are four areas that need to be addressed to improve the preparation

programs for principals to support and improve special education in their schools. These four areas are coursework, alignment of research and practice, faculty experience, and clinical experience. Recommendations are shared for ways that principal preparation programs can be modified to ensure that skills and expertise for leaders to establish inclusive and high-performing schools.

Pauline M. Sampson, Ph.D.

*Editor*

Kerry L. Roberts, Ph.D.

*Associate Editor*



## ***A View From The Field: How NCLB's Good Intentions of Accountability Damage Our Educational Leaders and Our Schools***

***Vance Vaughn<sup>1</sup>***

***The University of Texas at Tyler***

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School districts and campuses throughout the nation are working around the clock to avoid an unacceptable accountability rating under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001. In Texas the label has recently changed to "Improvement Required." An "Improvement Required" label forces districts and campuses into the Texas Accountability Intervention System (TAIS), a system implemented by Texas to satisfy the NCLB federal requirements, and to engage *struggling districts* and schools toward academic school improvement. The NCLB Act has good intentions; however, it might be creating a crisis in education. It is important to remember that NCLB, "the 2002 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), was born in bipartisan spirit to do something positive in the wake of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001" (Meier, Kohn, Darling-Hammond, Sizer & Wood, 2004, p. viii-ix). In addition, Meier, et al. stated "NCLB is premised on the notion that schools will be made better by following a yearly testing regime that leads to every child being proficient in reading, math, and science by 2014" (p. xii). The debate continues over whether the Act will accomplish what it set out to accomplish. The premise of the book *Many Children Left Behind*, by Meier, Khon, Darling-Hammond, Sizer and Wood (2004) is that "even if ...technical problems [with the NCLB implementations] are fixed, NCLB cannot, will not, and perhaps was even not intended to deliver on its promises" (p. xi).

Irrespective of the debate, educational leaders and schools are being forced to do whatever is necessary to survive the label of being an academic failure, whether it is earned or unfairly placed on them. The labels placed on schools are causing educational leaders to question their formal leadership training, to test their integrity and ethical conduct, and hold the ratings and status of their schools in a much higher regard than doing what is best for individual students. They are deciding whether they "*can* have their cake and eat it too." I share the following story with no great sense of pride.

### **The Story**

This past August I received a telephone call from a person in the Lakeview (pseudonym) Independent School District. This Special Programs Director for the school district was inquiring about the possibility of me serving as a Professional Service Provider (PSP) for their high school campus that fell into "Improvement Required" for the 2013 -2014 school year. This was the first time this very successful district has ever experienced failure of any sort under the NCLB accountability sanctions. The news was implausible. The initial shock released anger. After the anger, embarrassment settled over the district like a dark cloud before a major thunderstorm. According to the new standards, Index 4 requires schools to graduate as many students as possible on the Recommended or Distinguished (RHSP/DP) graduation program. The

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percentage of students graduating on the RHSP/DP program summed with the overall graduation rate for four and five-year graduation cohorts determine whether a campus met standard in Index 4. During the 2012 – 2013 school year, the year in question, Lakeview graduated 19 students, 11 on the Recommended plan and the remaining on the Minimum plan. Unfortunately, this 58% combined with the graduation rate fell short of the required percentage and Lakeview High School found itself paddling upstream in the Texas Accountability Intervention System (TAIS).

Lakeview is a small school district. It sits in the woody area and intersection of three fairly large school districts. The leadership, teachers and many of the students travel to the district to enjoy the small school atmosphere, the escape from crowded classrooms of the larger schools, and a chance to “start over.” Demographically, the school is predominately Anglo, and largely economically disadvantaged. While parent participation in the school is lacking, the students perform extremely well academically. However, this school’s report card, based primarily on state approved graduation plans, forces the school to operate with state interventions. In a real sense I was being asked to provide professional educational services and leadership to a group of professional educators and leaders who for years have helped their students in unprecedented ways. “While well intentioned, it has become clear that the NCLB Act will, in the next few years, label most of the nation’s public schools “failing,” even when they are high performing and improving in achievement” (Meier, Kohn, Darling-Hammond, Sizer and Wood, 2004, p. 5).

### **The Damage is Done**

The students who attend Lakeview appear to be happy as expressed by their smiles as they change from one class to the next. In Lakeview they can be the “star” on the football or volleyball team; a notability they could only dream of in one of the larger adjacent schools. Lakeview provides them an opportunity to blossom emotionally, athletically and academically. It might be their utopia.

Students perform well on the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR) and End of Course (EOC) tests. Their test scores have ranged from 75% to 96% in all subject areas and among all subgroups (although their size has limited them in the number of subgroups represented). Irrespective of the years of quality work produced by quality leaders, professional educators and dedicated staff, the community now views the school and the work performed in it as mediocre, unacceptable and failing. The damage has been done. A small technicality in types of graduation seals has caused wide-spread doubt in the minds of community members as they begin to question the leadership of the district, the ability of the teachers, and the possibility of the closure of the school.

### **Lakeview in Wonderland**

Lakeview has been closed before. The district operated as a Chapter 41 property rich school district because of the oil wells and mineral rights located within the district zone. When the wells ran dry, Lakeview High School had a very difficult time remaining open for several reasons. After closing in the late 1980s, and remaining closed for six years the school reopened again in 1994. The current superintendent, serving in that capacity for over 26 years, has survived the roller-coaster ride experience that Lakeview has endured. The leadership is absolutely not interested in entertaining any notion of spreading the message to the community that the school is facing intervention sanctions, and runs the risk of falling into the reconstitution

stage. However, they are at a crossroads. Which road they take depends a great deal on where they eventually wish to end up. Given all the training and experience that the leadership has engaged in, the crew has switched to survival mode. In this mode, nothing else matters but survival.

Currently, Lakeview has 13 seniors preparing for graduation in 2014. Of this 13, 12 students need to graduate on the Recommended or higher graduation plan in order for Lakeview to reach its Index 4 goal of 90%. As the Campus Leadership Team (CLT) reviews and analyzes the data, and writes a needs assessment with goals and strategies to reach those goals, they realize four of the students are members of special populations with an Individual Education Plan that does not allow them to take the courses needed to graduate on the Recommended Plan. In addition, one student, although very capable of graduating on the Recommended Plan, is choosing to graduate on the Minimum Plan for personal reasons. There is nothing wrong with graduating on the Minimum Plan. Students have entered the nearby community college with the Minimum Plan and have been very successful in their pursuits.

### **Pressure To Meet The Standards**

One could argue, quite legitimately, that the pressure to maintain the highest rating has been on our schools for a while, and the damage an unacceptable rating or improvement required rating have caused is nothing new. I have searched extensively and have found no research that supports our children are better prepared for colleges and universities, to be better employees, to be better prepared to enter the military, or to be better people as a result of graduating with a Recommended seal. According to Darling-Hammond (2012), many students who perform exceptionally well on standardized tests and/or graduate in the top percentages of their graduating class fail significantly in their first year at the university. Nonetheless, the reality is that school leadership is doing whatever is necessary by whatever means necessary to meet the standards in order to avoid a “failing” report card.

### **Closing Thoughts**

Lakeview is one of many schools that have fallen into the category of “failing” when in actuality the school is an educational lifesaver for many students. Lakeview’s story could be the story for many schools that have found themselves waddling in the muddy pits of the NCLB Act. Perhaps Lakeview’s students, like students in many other schools, need tools that are not offered in the NCLB box. Meier et al. (2004) offered the following conclusion:

There is no denying that NCLB has brought some long overdue attention to the problem of educational inequality. Those of us who wrestle daily with the realities of this inequality in our classrooms and our schools welcome this attention. The problem is that what NCLB proposes to do about this inequality is woefully inadequate to the task, and in some ways, will make things worse. It shines the spotlight on problems it has no strategies for solving and it imposes tests and sanctions that will increase inequality in education rather than reduce it. The more people see how NCLB actually works, the more it becomes clear that NCLB is not a tool for solving a crisis in public education, but a tool for creating one. Public schools need a very different tool kit for the problems we face. (p. 64-65)

The ultimate question could be: What tools are we offering in our educational leadership programs that could help our future leaders counteract the NCLB dilemma? Potential educational leaders complete our preparation programs equipped with the knowledge base and skills needed and required to be exceptional leaders. However, they find themselves bombarded with meeting standards of NCLB and maintaining accountability measures that keep them out of Improvement Required. Improvement just might be required, except in shaping and reshaping what was initially meant to be a step forward after September 11, 2001, but has arguably, according to some, resulted in two steps backwards.

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## ***Response to Accountability Policies by Principals and Teachers of Alternative Education: A Cross Case Analysis***

***Lynn M. Hemmer<sup>i</sup>***

***Texas A&M University Corpus Christi***

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National and state education policies continue to reflect a growing concern for educating the student at risk of dropping out of school. With the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001, it was expected that all public schools be held accountable in addressing remedies and preventative measures for dropouts. Since, 2001, backed by policy in thirty-three states, local education agencies have turned to alternative educational programs to decrease dropout and increase graduation rates (Jobs for the Future (JFF), 2009). While state policy, in general, gives districts latitude to develop these programs, it is often left to alternative school educators to provide meaningful learning experiences to at-risk students (Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2008). On one hand, NCLB's challenge for educators to "develop and execute plans of action they believe will effectively address achievement gaps" (Evans, 2009; pg. 64), resonates with the flexibility and concentrated best practices found in alternative education. However, questions arise when alternative school teachers and principals are expected to follow increasingly stringent accountability policies.

By all accounts, teachers and principals are expected to administer and comply with district, state, and federal policies and laws affecting schools. Implementing any policy may simply be a part of the legal and political context in which teachers and principals do their work (Gardiner, Canfield-Davis, & Anderson, 2009). At the same time, these educators are being required to negotiate and put in place policies amidst diverse knowledge and skill bases (Cohen & Ball, 1990; Darling-Hammond, 1990; Madsen, 1994; Shin, Gerard, & Bowyer, 2010). As Hope and Pigford (2002) point out, "...policies that compete or conflict with the pedagogical beliefs of educators are more likely to experience delayed implementation or suffer from superficial implementation" (p. 44).

As pressures mount to ensure equitable educational opportunities, alternative school teachers and principals face even greater challenges to comply with increasingly greater accountability policies. Knowing that educators must negotiate reform efforts and policy directives framed within their own context, experience, knowledge and skill base (Cohen and Ball, 1990; Darling-Hammond, 1990), important questions arise surrounding how teachers and principals in alternative education schools interpret and implement accountability policy and in what ways they define success for their students. This study, therefore, considers how seven principals and fifteen teachers at five alternative education schools in California and Texas administer accountability policies.

### **Background**

Schools that seek to re-engage the out-of-school student and/or reconnect the student who is at risk of dropping out of school through nontraditional means and strategies, i.e., alternative schools, are growing in importance (Aron, 2006) and numbers (Lehr, Moreau, Lange, &

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Lanners, 2004) as more and more students become disenfranchised and drop out of school (Kim & Taylor, 2008). It is not unusual for students attending alternative education settings to have experienced physical or emotional abuse, neglect, or abandonment; live under the poverty line; have fewer support systems; earn poor grades; and live in high-crime neighborhoods (Miller, 2004). They enroll in alternative schools because of poor grades, truancy, disruptive behavior, suspension, pregnancy, and other similar factors associated with an early departure from high school (Paglin & Fager, 1997). In addition, these students are more likely than their peers at the traditional high school to have higher mobility, live in foster care or with a relative other than a parent, be dependent on alcohol or drugs, and experience violence and victimization (Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2008). These risk factors taken separately or together suggest that these students experience a great deal of turbulence in their lives, making them more vulnerable and susceptible to dropping out of school.

As suggested by Phillips (2011), it is vital that our educational system takes into consideration all possible measures to prevent and recover dropouts as well as “capitalize on the knowledge and positive experiences that contribute to the academic success of at-risk youth” (p. 669). One such measure is the use of alternative schools to graduate students who are vulnerable and susceptible to dropping out of school. Successful alternative schools transform the educational experience of the at-risk student by focusing on and responding to the individual students’ academic and social needs (Hemmer, Madsen, & Torres, 2013). To meet these needs, alternative schools have adopted critical design attributes that are different than comprehensive high schools (Beken, Williams, Combs, & Slate, 2010). These critical attributes include smaller class sizes, self-paced instruction, personalized instructional practices, defined relationships and connectedness among students and their teachers, crisis/behavioral intervention, remedial and accelerated instruction (Aron, 2006; Carver, Lewis, & Tice (NCES), 2010; McClure, Yonezawa, & Jones, 2010; Raywid, 1994, 1999). In addition, many alternative schools use computer-based instruction allowing alternative schools more use control and flexibility for customized lessons, projects, and assessments, and progress tracking (Watson & Watson, 2011). For many, by addressing the physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development along a continuum of services that increase academic success, the alternative school setting provides an avenue for at-risk students to remain in school long enough to graduate (Hemmer, 2011; Sturgis & Patrick, 2010).

Alongside alternative school expansion (Carver, Lewis, & Tice, 2010), there has been a shift towards stringent accountability policies to ensure educational access and opportunity for members of ethnic minority groups, students who experience acute academic failure and children who live in poverty (Suh, Suh, & Houston, 2007). However, amidst high-stakes testing and greater academic standards, controversy and unresolved issues continue for these students and the schools that serve them. For instance, state policy allows local education agencies leeway to package alternative education programs as unique solutions to improve the quality of education for at-risk students and help reduce the number of students dropping out (Hoyle & Collier, 2006). However, alternative education programs have inconsistently been required to adhere to measurements set for other schools (Hemmer & Shepperson, 2012; JFF, 2009; Lehr, Tan, & Ysseldyke, 2009).

For example, states typically use a standards-based accountability system that emphasizes student achievement benchmarks measured by key assessments that include exams for high school graduation, scores on ACT or other college entrance exams, and completion of rigorous

academic coursework (Aron, 2006; Cavanagh, 2011; Grady, Bielick, & Aud, 2010; Hemmer & Shepperson, 2012). However, some states also have alternative accountability procedures for their alternative schools. For instance, California alternative schools may use the Alternative School Accountability Model (ASAM) that allows the school to self-select three out of 14 indicators to assess a school's ability to serve high-risk students (California Department of Education, 2011). The indicators used in this accountability model measure change in a student's readiness, engagement, and educational goal attainment. Texas alternative schools may use the Alternative Education Accountability (AEA) procedures that allow the school to choose either an absolute performance standard or designate degrees of improvement for state achievement tests, school completion measures, and annual dropout rates (Texas Education agency, 2011).

While several significant differences set these alternative school assessment reports apart from traditional school assessments, these schools must still adhere to NCLB expectations and report adequate yearly progress. Most concerning is whether the standards-based accountability standards reflected in NCLB requirements conflict with how alternative schools' success has been previously calculated. Historically, alternative school success has often been calculated by improved attendance, recovery of missing course credits, passing grades, and various routes to a high school diploma (Aron, 2006; Hemmer, 2012; Raywid, 1999).

With the intersection of accountability and alternative schools, it is important to understand how alternative school educators work to administer accountability policies while at the same time provide meaningful learning experiences to the least successful students (Ruiz de Velasco, et al., 2008). The pervasive influence of accountability may be redefining how school leaders and teachers approach providing meaningful learning experiences and facilitating high achievement (Crum & Sherman, 2008; Rutledge, Harris, & Ingle, 2010; Spillane, Reiser, & Reimer, 2002). Spillane (2002) found with the advent of more stringent accountability procedures, there has been a push to change how teacher teach, what they should teach, and how they determine acceptable levels of student mastery. As evident from Hemmer's (2012) study that examined teachers' enactment of equity in the alternative education settings, accountability policy procedures reduced alternative school teachers' pedagogical choices to computer-based programs, self-paced programs, and accelerated curriculum to ensure students' quick graduation. With these choices, district and teacher decisions further limited students' opportunity for acquiring a high quality education as intended by NCLB by excluding at-risk students from a common, more rigorous curriculum available to students at traditional schools. Complicating matters for alternative school educators is that they are under increasing pressure to create and sustain innovative strategies and practices to keep the struggling student engaged long enough to graduate from high school.

### **Theoretical Frame**

A policy implementation frame is presented to be able to draw comparisons between policy initiatives and individual actions (Cohen, Moffit, & Goldin, 2007; Madsen, 1994; Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973; Spillane, Reiser, & Reimer, 2002). It is often left to local education agencies to decode the federal and state broad policy strokes defining accountability policies. Local education agencies decode policy text in context to show how it relates to their community and pass it on to those charged with the implementation, as in this case alternative school principals and teachers (Spillane, 2008). Thuse, while policymakers may view the school accountability

movement as necessary (Moe, 2003), there is much reliance on an educator to assume the role as a policy actor.

From a theoretical perspective, a distinct yet untested factor of compliance may impact how alternative school teachers and principals administer accountability policy. First, policy design ordinarily relies heavily on the authoritative nature of law that compels people to comply (Vago, 2003). Previous studies suggested that those charged with making and enforcing public school policy have their interpretation and implementation of such policies against the legal and authoritative backdrop of law.

A second factor, the social constructs surrounding policy compliance, perhaps plays a more pivotal role when implementing a mandated policy (Schepple, 1994; Stone, 1964). For instance, teachers and principals may interpret policy through what they consider a lens that is morally correct, feasible and intellectually a defensible course of action as opposed to their compliance as governed by policy rules (Rein and Rabinovitz, 1978).

According to Ball (1993), educators, in general, first conceptualize policy based on their own history, experiences, skills, resources, and context. And then, they apply a subjective moral or ethical judgment that might bypass the letter of the law in the interest of the spirit of the law (Bronfenbrenner, 1973; Gans, 1973; Jones-Wilson, 1986; Konvitz, 1973). This may prove to be even more troublesome for alternative school teachers and principals. Because people attach different meaning to concepts of fairness and justice (Harvey & Klein, 1985), the alternative school teachers and principals, in addition to contending with their own subjective realities that construct, filter, mediate, and shape their educational practice (Smit, 2005), may also be influenced by their students' experiences and histories concerning risk.

## Methodology

This research was designed as a qualitative cross case study focusing on a unit of similar groups of people within a specified phenomenon, event, or program based on certain characteristics (Merriam, 1998) and the notion of a bounded system (Smith, 1978). Specifically, this cross case study (Yin, 2003) focused on teachers and principals of alternative schools to provide insight as to how accountability policy is administered for at-risk students. This study utilized two data analysis techniques. First, from a macro-level perspective, a qualitative thematic analysis (Morse & Richards, 2002) was used to first categorize and make judgments about the interpretation of the data. These patterns were then compared with patterns that emerged and were identified through a microanalysis utilizing critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1989, 1992, 1995). Coupling thematic and discourse analysis allowed for a holistic picture of the inter-connections between patterns of cultural norms and naturalized practices (Fairclough, 1992) with policy texts and broader political change as found with education reformation (Jacobs, 2006).

**Data Sources.** Seven principals and fifteen teachers in five school districts located in California and Texas participated in this study. These two states were chosen because they continue to redefine policies that serve students who are at risk of dropping out of school as well as offer important similarities of student demographics. The five schools were situated in diverse demographic contexts ranging from less than 50 students to over 300, all with a similar mission, to serve a student population identified as predominantly at risk for school failure. All schools, but one, were majority minority. Two of the schools had a large Hispanic population (83% and



96%) with most students economically disadvantaged (70% and 89%, respectively). The other three schools had semi-equal differentiated demographics among African American, Hispanic, and White populations.

Of the administrators and teachers who participated, critical variation occurred across gender, ethnicity, and experience. For instance, four administrators were female and three were male, one African American, two Hispanics, and four White. All but one administrator had more than 15 years' experience of cumulative administrative experience. Eleven of the teachers were female and four were male. Furthermore, of the 15 teachers, two were African American, two Hispanic, nine White, and the ethnicity of the remaining two teachers was classified as *Other*. The teaching experiences and courses taught by these participants varied as well.

**Data Collection.** Data collected included (a) governmental artifacts of state policies addressing at-risk students, district policy pertaining to dropout prevention/recovery, state/federal accountability measures for alternative education, campus/district accountability documents, student academic progress templates, school brochures, school websites, and newsletters/newspaper articles; (b) school observations consisting of various scenarios of administrator/teacher/student interaction (office, classroom, before school, after school, transition periods, community meetings), faculty meetings, and when available school/community socials; and (c) interviews conducted with all participants.

**Data Analysis.** A discourse analysis process became the unit of coding wherein the participants' interviews became the primary unit of analysis. Policy text and observations became the secondary unit. The interviews were analyzed in a number of phases. A discursive logic following Kenway (1990), Taylor, Rizvi, Lingard, and Henry (1997), and Gale (1999) mapped the interconnectedness between policy as text—the “what”; policy as ideology—the “why”; and policy as discourse—the “how.” By utilizing a discourse analysis methodology, assumptions and motivations of judgments of policy expressed by teachers and principals were revealed. This method is appropriate to studying how educators construct and eventually enact meaning from accountability policy.

## Findings

A number of themes emerged from this study, however, the discussion of this article is restricted to the ways alternative education teachers and principals administer accountability policy. Consistent with McDonnell and Elmore (1983) theorizing about external pressures to comply with policy directives, the researchers equally applied Schepple's (1994) and Stone's (1964) theories relating to how compliance may be socially constructed because of the participants' beliefs, motivations and perceptions of the policy at hand. The themes that emerged from the data included responding to accountability pressures and defining student success. From the literature, we know that the conventional notion of policy implementation may rest on the authoritative nature of policy design that includes mandates, forbid actions or even create incentives for policy actors to comply (Cohen *et al.*, 2007; Vago, 2003). Yet, serious dilemmas for alternative school teachers and principals take place when their beliefs about their students and how best to serve them in an era of accountability are included in the policy process.

**Responding to accountability pressures.** Previous studies (e.g. Hoy & Miskel, 2001) suggest that coping mechanisms are employed to protect and/or insulate schools from external activities

such as federal/state/local policy initiatives. As evidenced through the data, both the teachers and principals in this study worked, albeit in different ways, to minimize the connection between policy and their practice.

For instance, many of the teachers attempted to disassociate themselves from policy by stating their indifference to accountability policy and/or their lack of knowledge concerning the intricacies of said policy. Most certainly, personal feelings regarding accountability emerged from the teacher interviews. It was not uncommon for teachers to share that they did not have a vested interest in the intent of accountability or give credit to accountability policies as a means that prompted any changes to their classroom practice.

One Texas teacher interpreted accountability to mean that test data are more readily available to disaggregate. She reflected on the purpose of disaggregating test data: "Well, we actually look at that data [state test scores] and try to figure out, OK, what were our strengths and weaknesses." But when asked if accountability policy was the driving force to initiate change in classroom practice, then she quickly responded, "No, I really don't think [accountability] is a driving force for those changes. I think that just education is a driving force. I mean it has to be done."

Another teacher, a special education teacher from California, was concerned at the beginning of the interview because, as she shared, "I just feel I don't know as much about [accountability]. When I think about [it], I just think about we have the [state test], the algebra requirement, and other than that I don't know the impact, I don't know."

Administrators on the other hand were far more direct in their responses. In all schools, they were quick to showcase maverick and/or symbolic gestures of resistance in having to include their students in detailed standardized accountability measures. However, interestingly enough, there was no consensus as to their interpretation of why their students had to be included in accountability policy. On one end of the spectrum, an administrator from Texas shared that she believed the policy aim of NCLB and its accountability procedures served as a catalyst to drive action and practice to ultimately achieve academic equity for disadvantaged students.

I have a real problem with not being held accountable, so I think we need to have an NCLB, does it need to be tweaked? Yes. But do we need to have expectation of what schools are able to do with kids? I think we do. Because, I remember when there wasn't [accountability standards] and so if you were poor, Hispanic or economically disadvantaged or lived in certain part of the country, it didn't matter what you learned, nobody cared. Maria

On the other end of the spectrum, at least two of the administrators from California put much effort into creating purposeful distance between their practice and policy.

And this is so educationally unprofessional, I couldn't give a rat's patootie about NCLB. I've been doing this a long, long time. What I think one of the biggest things missing in education is common sense. And you can give me all the NCLB's, all these acronyms, and blahs, blahs, blahs, blahs, blahs, blahs, blahs [melodic]. Sam

However, when examining the percentage of students testing proficient at this particular school, it is important to note that for Sam's school accountability report card, two elements stand out: (a) often the number of students testing per grade level, per subject was less than ten, thus too

small for statistical accuracy to be included and (b) when data were available, the majority minority (Hispanic) and children of poverty subgroups did not score at either the proficient or advanced for ELA, math and history.

**Defining success.** Another theme to emerge from the data was how success is defined for the at-risk student, specifically the measurements principals and teachers used to describe student success. Accountability policy provides standards by which to measure student success, e.g. student achievement measured by state assessments, graduation. However, for the participants, defining success for at-risk students proved to be less standardized and at times ambiguous. While each participant shared stories of individual students who had overcome social and/or personal obstacles, this did not translate to academic accomplishments nor necessarily mean that students had graduated. While these “success” stories were poignant examples derived from students overcoming or managing their “risk” conditions, they often included stories of students *showing up to school, not doing drugs, following the rules, completing so many credits in a given timeframe*. These measures of success became indiscriminate and yet accepted as the norm for the at-risk student. As evidenced from the school accountability report cards, an outcome of having these expectations is that there is no assurance that the students were provided with a set of academic skills.

This proved problematic for some principals and teachers as they attempted to reconcile their expectations of students with accountability standards. For example, one teacher shared:

If I have a kid that sits still for a day and actually reads and writes a little bit, and that is progress over the day before and weeks before, that’s measurement, but I don’t put a number on it.

The principal from the same school acknowledged,

The policy [NCLB] in my words is that each of them [student] is getting everything they need in their education. And then, they are supposed to be able to take these state tests, and pass them to graduate. But, that’s not happening. Students are not all graduating. They may finish their course work, but they can’t pass the state test.

## Conclusion

By examining accountability policy in conjunction with teacher and principal practice, helps to deconstruct what it means for a student to be at risk and enrolled in an alternative school. The findings from this study have demonstrated that situating policy implementation with teacher and principal, as policy actors, within a specific educational environment allowed the discourse of risk to emerge. In turn, how risk is defined, and addressed is evident in the themes of how teachers and principals respond to accountability policy as well as how success is defined. Traditional accountability indicators used to measure student success are quietly debated and eventually shadowed by an educator’s attempt to distance themselves, their school and their students from accountability policies. In turn, while the concept of risk is both defined and prominent in policy frameworks, the teachers and principals, in this study, drew on their own constructs of risk to reveal a narrow definition of equity for an already disadvantaged population of students.

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## ***School Counselors' Perceptions about Interventions for At-Risk Students Including Grade Retention: Implications for School Leaders***

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The term *at-risk* is used by educators and policymakers to describe a wide variety of students who struggle in schools (Kronholz, 2011). Factors associated with labeling students at-risk include minority status, poverty, language difficulties, low school attendance, and poor family support (Reglin, Akpo-Sanni, Losike-Sedimo, 2012; Stockard, 2010). For many at-risk students, reading at a proficient level is a primary concern for school leaders and teachers (Allington, 2011; McAlenney & Coyne, 2011), especially with increased accountability including school sanctions for not closing reading achievement gaps (Chappell, Nunnery, Pribesh, & Hager, 2011). Although a plethora of interventions have been proposed to assist at-risk students, requiring students to repeat a grade continues to be used as a threat for students who are not proficient, despite evidence that suggests grade retention is detrimental to students on various outcomes (Battistin & Schizzerotto, 2012; Webley, 2012).

As researchers study educators' perceptions about interventions for at-risk students, they typically focus on school leaders and teachers, those directly responsible for planning interventions and allocating instructional resources (Kronholz, 2011; Lane, Pierson, Robertson, & Little, 2004). Not to be overlooked, school counselors are instrumental in supporting at-risk students (ASCA National Model®, 2012; Ryan, Kaffenberger, & Carroll, 2011; White & Kelly, 2010) and measuring their perceptions about interventions for low performing students is an important research endeavor. Because school principals are charged with creating intervention frameworks to support at-risk students (Johnson & Perkins, 2009), it makes sense for school principals to engage school counselors in this process as they are instrumental in fostering the academic and social needs of all students. The first step in this process is for school principals to understand how school counselors perceive various interventions for at-risk students. As a result, the purpose of this study is to ascertain school counselors' perceptions about interventions for at-risk students, including retention.

### **Research Design and Methods**

This study used an online survey to measure school counselors' perceptions and was designed to answer the research question: What are school counselors' perceptions about possible

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interventions for at-risk students? The survey was sent to a random sample (N=2929) of members of the American School Counseling Association (ASCA) who were practicing school counselors across the United States, and 338 counselors responded to the survey, a response rate of 12%. Participants average years of school counseling experience was 11.35 years. Additionally, 173 were secondary counselors (middle, junior high, or high school) and 157 respondents were elementary counselors.

The online survey was created by the researchers and asked school counselors to select interventions they believed benefitted at-risk students. At-risk student characteristics included: (a) emotionally immaturity, (b) physical development delayed in comparison to peers, (c) social, emotional, and or behavior difficulties, (d) poor academic performance, (e) lack of motivation, and (f) English Language Learner (ELL) linguistic difficulties. To ensure interventions included on the survey were reliable and credible, the researchers relied on expert reviewers who were knowledgeable and experienced regarding interventions counselors might recommend for at-risk students. Interventions on the survey included: (a) retain, (b) involve parents, (c) refer to special education, (d) provide counseling, (e) refer to administrator, and (f) recommend summer school. The survey concluded with one open-ended question that asked school counselors to describe supports in place for retained students.

## **Findings**

Counselors were asked to select interventions they believed were appropriate for various types of at-risk students. Table 1 displays the interventions selected by counselors for each type of at-risk student at either the elementary or secondary level.

**Table 1*****Counselors' Perceptions about Intervention for At-Risk Students***

At-Risk Characteristic	Interventions											
	Retain		Involve parents		Special education		Provide counseling		Refer to admin		Summer school	
	E	S	E	S	E	S	E	S	E	S	E	S
Emotionally immature	25	23	153	156	8	7	132	140	19	16	33	33
Physical developmental delay	4	9	105	107	37	36	40	62	19	11	10	13
Social difficulties	5	2	148	151	14	19	151	160	25	33	11	9
Poor academic performance	45	67	154	157	88	79	90	116	47	49	122	128
Poor attendance	14	28	151	158	2	4	105	112	119	120	71	87
Lack of motivation	4	12	156	157	15	21	148	157	60	64	46	58
ELL issues	6	4	141	135	18	24	41	66	44	53	90	82
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>145</b>	<b>1008</b>	<b>1021</b>	<b>182</b>	<b>190</b>	<b>707</b>	<b>813</b>	<b>333</b>	<b>346</b>	<b>383</b>	<b>410</b>

Note: E=elementary counselor; S=secondary counselor; respondents could select more than one type of intervention for each characteristic

Overwhelmingly, both elementary and secondary counselors selected parent involvement as the most appropriate intervention for all types of students at both levels (elementary  $n=1008$ ; secondary  $n=1021$ ) and selected parent involvement as the most appropriate intervention for six of the seven types of student characteristics (emotionally immature; physical development delay; poor academic performance, poor attendance, lack of motivation, and ELL issues). For students who had social difficulties, elementary counselors ( $n=151$ ) and secondary counselors ( $n=160$ ) believed individual counseling was the most appropriate intervention. Conversely, both elementary and secondary counselors selected grade retention as the least appropriate intervention for at-risk students (elementary  $n=103$ ; secondary  $n=145$ ).

With the open-ended items, the primary objective in coding items was to utilize frequency analysis to determine themes commonly held in school counselors' responses. Coding was done individually by each researcher and then collaboratively until agreement was reached about common themes. *Communicating with Parents* and *Tailoring Strategies for Individual Students* were the themes that emerged related to interventions for at-risk students.

### **Communicating with Parents**

Counselors consistently referred to the crucial need to communicate with parents as soon as their child's struggles begin. Counselors purported that parents can be helpful to find specific aids for a student, and parents need to be involved early in the problem solving process as educators discuss ways to support a struggling student. According to one counselor "underlying issues contribute to unsuccessful academic performance" and communication with parents can offer understanding of pertinent information and circumstances. Too often a teacher may visit extensively with other educators in the building before contacting parents to alert them as to a worrisome situation and explore helpful ideas together. Other counselors agreed, noting that "If parents do not support a decision for their child, then it will be unsuccessful." Numerous counselors purported that early elementary school may be an appropriate time for parents and educators to make any retention decision rather than wait until the later school years.

Meanwhile, high school counselors consistently emphasized the unlikely occurrence of retention for their students. Many stated, "We do not retain in our high school." The reality is that students fail and repeat classes, as compared to any type of purposeful retention decision with parents that moves a student back an entire grade level. Several high school counselors exclaimed that grade retention chosen in high school "...is a mistake." One counselor illustrated the point by saying "I have seen that 19 year old juniors do not tend to graduate. Counselors need to find the root of the problem and involve the student and parents in the solution." Another representative comment was, "The older the child is when retained, the more likely for behavior problems to follow academic problems." Another counselor noted, "The stigma of being held back never goes away." Finally, other counselors commented that "The kids lose motivation," and

“...retention is highly correlated with dropping out.” Clearly, counselors do not support the idea of grade retention at the secondary level.

Acknowledgement of extenuating family conditions emerged from the counselors’ ideas of wraparound services that could help meet children’s basic needs such as food, shelter and medical issues. Counselors suggested a variety of “outside community agencies” and “social services” to provide “home-based intervention” to help families and “socially and economically disadvantaged children.” As one counselor wrote, “Providing more support at home can often alleviate issues at school.” At the same time, another counselor suggested, “Parents should be held accountable for excessive absences of their children in the early grades,” and “mandatory parent involvement” should be required. Parenting skills classes that assist parents in taking responsibility were also mentioned. Overall, counselors seemed to believe that once the basic needs of parents and children have been met, the focus can move to the child’s academic and social/emotional health.

Counselors identified district policies as a means to set the foundation for respectful communication and expectations among stakeholders, including parents. While some counselors stated that parents should be members of the decision making team early in the process, others believed that parents should have absolute veto power related to the final retention decision. In general, counselors desired broad policies that would allow retention decisions to be tailored by a collaborative team to individual children and families rather than following a process dictated by rigid, narrow district or school policies.

### **Tailoring Strategies for Individual Students**

Once a retention decision has been made, counselors offered a variety of ideas to support the student. The great majority of respondents asserted the need to tailor ongoing strategies to fit the individual student’s needs and circumstances. Top priority was gathering together everyone who might be helpful in creating a comprehensive, specific plan of support for the student. Initially, some kind of “health screening or medical check with a pediatrician or eye doctor can be part of the solution,” commented one counselor.

Meanwhile, a few counselors offered the reminder that sometimes a student could be lagging due to an array of developmental issues, thus very early retention in preschool or kindergarten could provide a fresh start academically without social/emotional stigma or need for significant follow-up. Retention in the very early years often yields students who then, noted one counselor, “are on target with their new peers” and need little monitoring. “There isn’t always a plan,” concluded another counselor. On the other hand, many counselors were firm in their perspective that students retained after the early elementary years struggle and need careful “monitoring of academic and social/emotional progress” to optimize a retention decision. Numerous counselors stated that they never or rarely retained students at their school after the early years and instead took action with specific, targeted interventions as part of student services such as required tutoring with the Title I staff members, Response to Intervention (RTI) Tier I or II procedures, and Credit

Recovery programs. Another suggested the idea of “5<sup>th</sup> year seniors on a very limited basis,” in keeping with several other counselors’ comments. Counselors working in private schools, magnet schools, and Career Vocational Schools overwhelmingly commented that retention does not happen since those situations are taken care of with academic probation or a student leaving school.

As far as possibilities in control of the school itself, counselors proposed mentoring programs with significant adults and other students to create social engagement and peer-bonding. Other ideas mentioned were rewards, attendance contracts, peer buddies, guided reading groups, support study halls, and time in the learning center. Also available may be opportunities through the school’s RTI process that may support modifications in the regular classroom including differentiated instruction and positive behavior supports. More the half the counselors cited before and after school activities as providing valuable academic assistance as well as, according to one counselor, “social/emotional growth” opportunities. Suggested programs encompassed: homework assistance, individual tutoring, study skills groups, social skills training, positive peer connections via interest clubs, Gear Up, ELL accommodations, and supervised recreation.

Reiterating the idea of finding services to support parents and families, counselors cited social and service agencies in the community. With socio-economic family concerns as a cause for many student challenges, outside help for some families is critical. One counselor commented that the “LARGEST issues are attendance and apathy. Our staff goes to student homes and brings [the students] to school.” In summary, counselors accentuated the need for wraparound services to consider all possible intervention and prevention strategies for each student as a unique individual.

## Discussion

Results of this study provide three important conclusions that are highlighted to frame our recommendations for school leaders. First, unlike other perceptual studies (Range, Holt, Pijanowski, & Young, 2012; Witner, Hoffman, & Nottis, 2004), elementary and secondary school counselors did not view grade retention as an appropriate intervention for at-risk students. In fact, grade retention was the least selected intervention to support at-risk students, indicating school counselors’ dissatisfaction with its use. However, in response to open ended items on the survey, elementary and secondary school counselors viewed grade retention slightly differently, because at the secondary level, at-risk students fail classes as opposed to being required to repeat an entire grade. As a result, some counselors in our study viewed early grade retention as less traumatic than retention in the later grades, a finding supported by other researchers (Siberglitt, Jimerson, Burns, & Appleton, 2006). However, this stance ignores longitudinal studies that attribute early grade retention to dropping out of school (Jimerson & Ferguson, 2007; Roderick & Nagaoka, 2006).

Second, school counselors believed parental involvement was the most appropriate intervention for all types of students, a finding that also aligns with other perceptual

studies (Johnson, 1997; Range, Yonke, & Young, 2011). We argue that parent involvement for at-risk students should be much more than parents simply attending parent/teacher conferences or volunteering in classrooms. Parent involvement in schools, especially for the parents of at-risk students, must be designed to mimic what Snow (2002) refers to as personal and cognitive involvement. That is, the school provides parents with the skill development to personally engage and support at-risk students' cognitive or emotional struggles. In addition, collaborative problem solving with educators and parents can alleviate student distress to provide optimal academic and social/emotional support.

Thirdly, school counselors recommended academic or behavioral interventions should be tailored to the individual deficits of each child with several counselors suggesting RTI as the primary framework to do this. Clearly, school counselors understand what others have postulated (Pearce, 2009; Sansosti, Noltmeyer, & Goss, 2010); early intervention coupled with a system of tiered interventions that are research based and implemented with fidelity, is the most systematic means by which to support at-risk students.

### **Recommendations for School Leaders**

Based on our findings, we present two recommendations for school leaders. First, as current school reform initiatives advocate for principals to adopt a distributed leadership style (Spillane, 2005), it makes sense for principals to engage school counselors in creating intervention services for at-risk students. A challenge for principals as they engage counselors in this process is deterring them from thinking early grade retention is an appropriate intervention for at-risk students, as beliefs inform practice (Bonvin, Bless, & Schuepbach, 2008). Counselors in this study advocated for RTI as a promising initiative to assist at-risk students, and researchers argue RTI's expansion might reduce grade retention rates (Range & Yocum, 2012). As a result, principals should engage school counselors as key stakeholders in planning and monitoring interventions for at-risk students. For example, school counselors might: (a) serve as the point person in collecting progress-monitoring data on students receiving Tier 2 or Tier 3 interventions within RTI, (b) be involved in creating formal behavior intervention plans for at-risk students who require emotional support, (c) communicate with parents about the RTI process and how they can actively engage in the process, and (d) be involved in placing students in classes with teachers who will best support their learning styles (Ryan et al., 2011).

Secondly, in this study and others, school practitioners continue to view parent involvement as the most appropriate intervention for at-risk students and for students who might be retained (Range et al., 2012). Goodall (2012) argues that schools should focus less on parental involvement and more on parent engagement. To make this a priority, principals might create a two-part vision for what they believe parent engagement should look like in schools. Part one could include a plan for engaging parents in a meaningful manner while they are at schools and at home. Part two should include professional development for teachers about communicating and engaging parents, especially those

who have students who struggle (Fiore, 2011; Rapp & Duncan, 2012). We recommend this process begin by involving teachers in conversations about barriers parents face when attempting to engage in schools (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). It is important for school leadership teams to understand that although some barriers are outside the schools' control (socioeconomic status, language, and ethnicity), barriers identified within schools can be overcome by educators who take ownership of the obstacles (Goodall, 2012). Additionally, principals might ask teachers why schools value parent engagement (Harris & Goodall, 2008) because teacher attitudes will greatly influence how parents perceive their own engagement in schools (LaRocque, Kleiman, & Darling, 2011). Clearly identifying why schools value parents and communicating this regularly increases the chances they will engage in their children's learning.

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## ***Insight for Teacher Preparation Program Administrators: Enhancing Pre-service Educators' Intercultural Sensitivity and Deep Proficiency in Culturally Responsive Teaching through Short-Term Study Abroad***

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Teacher preparation program administrators face the issue of expanding curricula to prepare teacher candidates for the diverse population of students they will encounter (Trent, Kea, Oh, 2008). Globalization demands that teacher candidates grasp how to function in a more integrated and interdependent society (McGrew, 2005). According to Smith-Davis (2004) students from non-English speaking countries compose the fastest growing United States K-12 student population, and those identified as limited English proficient were over 10 million in 2004. The United States Census reported in the "New Census Bureau Report" the number of individuals five and older who speak languages other than English at home more than doubled in the past three decades (2010). If teacher preparation program leaders fail to prepare future educators with the dispositions, knowledge, and skills necessary to meet the needs of the nation's school population, the national security and economic development may be hindered, and the position of the United States in the world community may be challenged (Zanh, 2011).

Teacher preparation program leaders are faced with how to strengthen "teacher candidates' level of intercultural sensitivity" and to prepare them to implement culturally responsive pedagogy through course content and other activities (Lin, Lake, & Rice, 2008, p. 188). Integrating multicultural education throughout all courses instead of adding a stand-alone course dedicated to cultural awareness and instruction is one manner to enhance candidates' level of intercultural sensitivity, and this means is supported by many researchers (Cochran-Smith, Davis, & Fries, 2004). Another way to heighten intercultural sensitivity and gain skill in delivering culturally-responsive teaching

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strategies is through cross-cultural experiences (Foster, 1995; Gay, 2000; McAllister & Irving, 2002; Nieto, 2006). One such cross-cultural experience that deans, department heads, and faculty may explore is short-term study abroad. Short-term study abroad is more affordable and attractive to university students who cannot or will not commit to a semester or yearlong study abroad experience (Donnelly-Smith, 2009). As defined by Donnelly-Smith (2009), short-term study abroad experiences are those where students participate for fewer than eight weeks. These experiences have the potential of positively impacting teacher candidates' intercultural sensitivity (Lawton et al., 2006). Donnelly-Smith stated that little formal research was displayed in the literature that described study abroad outcomes (2009).

The purpose of this paper is to reveal how a short-term study abroad experience affected teacher candidates from a Texas regional university, and thus enhanced their intercultural sensitivity and deepened their knowledge and skill in culturally-responsive teaching strategies. This study was unique from other studies presented in the literature because the focus was how another country implements early childhood education and prepares future teachers. Teacher candidates were afforded an opportunity to compare Italy's early childhood education system to the system they were more familiar with in the United States.

### **Literature Review**

To frame this inquiry, a review of literature included the definition and rationale for study abroad experiences, negative and positive benefits of short-term study abroad, characteristics of effective short-term study abroad experiences, and changing the cultural and instructional awareness of participants as a result of study abroad.

Short-term study abroad experiences in higher education usually follow one of three models: week-long programs conducted usually during spring break, three- or four-week programs occurring during the January break, or summer experiences involving up to eight weeks (Donnelly-Smith, 2009). Peterson et al. (2007) defined study abroad experiences as academic programs occurring outside the students' home country that are intended to enrich their learning experiences. Donnelly-Smith (2009) explained that short-term study abroad experiences are the most common type for undergraduates in the United States. Less than two percent of all higher education students in the United States participate in any type of study abroad experience (Donnelly-Smith, 2009). The Institute of International Education's 2012 Open Doors Report corroborated the Donnelly-Smith study and revealed that only about two percent of United States' students study abroad. The majority participating are involved in short-term study abroad.

Contrasting views of the benefits of short-term study abroad were presented. Some researchers indicated short-term study abroad experiences were more vacations than scholarly endeavors (Donnelly-Smith, 2009). Other experts relayed concerns that these types of experiences focused more on traveling and exploring rather than on academic learning outcomes (Coryell, 2011). Ritz (2011) revealed that those who oppose short-

term study abroad experiences believe that transformative learning cannot take place in such a short time. Gray, Murdock, & Stebbins (2002) and Green (2002) concurred by stating that not all study abroad experiences have at the core important learning or transformational results.

In contrast, numerous benefits of short-term study abroad experiences were demonstrated. Lewis and Niesenbaum (2005) discovered that students who engaged in short-term study abroad experiences exhibited increased willingness to participate in courses outside of their major, had more confidence to travel in longer-term experiences, were more interested in interdisciplinary studies after the experiences, and displayed increased cultural perception of globalization. Paige et al. stated the duration, short-term versus longer experiences, of global engagement was not significant (2009). Benefits of short-term study experiences revealed by Tajés and Ortiz (2010) were changes in mind-set, attitudes toward differing cultures, and eagerness to learn about other cultures and self. Dwyer (2004) also agreed with Tajés and Ortiz by stating that these types of experiences changed the global perspectives and cross-cultural effectiveness of participants. Corda (2007) added that short-term study abroad increased participants' self-reliance and self-confidence. Love and Goodwell-Love (1995) found that by adding study abroad experiences into higher education, faculty were incorporating emotional and social components to their intellectual education. Ritz (2011) likewise believed that these experiences, while increasing a global view, awareness of differing cultures, and self-assurance, also provided faculty with opportunities to help students develop emotionally and socially. Another byproduct of study abroad experiences was affirmed by Ritz (2011). In his study of a short-term study abroad experience in Costa Rica, he found that the emotional and social connections among faculty and students were strengthened thus allowing for more open discussion. This open relationship thus positively impacted the development of students and their learning outcomes (Love & Goodsell-Love, 1995).

Effective, short-term study abroad experiences have common characteristics. Donnelly-Smith (2009) stated that short-term study abroad experiences have a strong connection to coursework and are an essential part of a larger experience. Five best practices according to Spencer and Tuma (2002) were start with very clear academic content, guarantee that faculty have the knowledge and skills to conduct experiential teaching, ensure that the experiences integrate with the local community studied, use experts as lecturers from the host country, and require participants to engage in ongoing reflection. Another best practice reiterated by Donnelly-Smith was preparation for students and faculty (2009). As Gardinier, and Colquitt-Anderson so eloquently stated, "...students should arrive at the destination with a grounding in both the academic and cultural contexts through a combination of pre-departure lectures, guided research, online discussions, readings, and cultural events related to the trip" (2010, p. 26).

Short-term study abroad experiences can provide a vehicle for changing cultural awareness. Orndorff (1998) conducted a study that evidenced participants who experienced short-term travel perceived transformative changes in understanding of other cultures. Sleeter (2001) and Wiest (2004) agreed that study abroad experiences enabled

pre-service teacher candidates to experience cultures of students they may teach and to develop a cross-cultural understanding and world view. Likewise, Chieffo and Griffiths (2004) conducted a broad study investigating the outcomes of short-term study abroad. These researchers revealed that students deepened appreciation for foreign cultures and increased in their ability to make connections between home and host countries. Lindsey (2005) completed a qualitative study of values development in United States and Scottish social work students who participated in a study-abroad program. She discovered that participants became more receptive to new ways of thinking. The Institute for the International Education of Students (2000-2011) conducted a broad study of former participants of its programs from 1920 to 1999. Findings disclosed that international programs positively impacted participants' cultural-understanding.

Literature concerning teacher instructional change and study abroad experiences was reviewed. The research of Sandgren et al. declared that study abroad experiences had a positive outcome on "globalizing and enriching an instructor's domestic teaching" (1999, p. 25). Raby (2008) expressed that spending time in a foreign country was a revealing experience providing participants with opportunities for professional development. Taylor (2008) disclosed that transformative learning was the vehicle where adults validated their beliefs, and this type of learning afforded them opportunities to engage in a meaning-making process that was more accepting of differences. Ritz (2011), a supporter of transformative learning, acknowledged that study abroad programs placed students in a different cultural context which created a feeling of incongruity. He relayed that this feeling created opportunities for validating held beliefs and constructing beliefs that were more inclusive of others from differing cultures. The review of literature provided the foundation for a case study.

### **Methodology**

Researchers employed a case study method to discover how an Italian short-term study abroad experience affected teacher candidates (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009). Case study is a method that provides "intensive descriptions and analyses of a bounded system" (Merriam, p. 19). The present investigation was implemented for 12 days in May of 2012 in Italy. The study abroad experience was a requirement for a Maymester course titled Elementary Education 475/575: Special Problems/International Study of Professional Roles and Responsibilities in Italy.

Short-term study abroad is an annual experience offered by the Department of Elementary Education in the university of the participants in this study. Only students who attended this university at least one semester in the 12 months prior to the experience and maintained a grade point average of 2.5 were eligible to apply. Space was limited to no more than 30 students. So, students were selected on a first come, first serve basis. Scholarships of approximately \$800 were provided by the university's Office of International Programs, and to apply for the scholarship, students wrote a 500-word essay and completed a scholarship application. Scholarship recipients were required to attend

one university event provided by international students and were to prepare a class presentation or video about the experience no later than three weeks after the trip. Over the past several years, the Department of Elementary Education offered experiences to Germany and Italy, but only one experience per academic year was offered.

All of the participants for this 2012 Italian experience (two graduate and 22 undergraduate) agreed to participate in the study. Participants were female and between 20 and 40 years of age. Two were Hispanic and 22 were White. Twenty were seeking early childhood through sixth grade certification, one was seeking grade four through eighth grade mathematics certification, and three were from other disciplines: Child and Family Development, Accounting, Secondary Education. Sixteen had never traveled outside of the United States. English was the native language and only language spoken by 22 of the participants. Two of the participants had some knowledge of Spanish, but none of the candidates spoke Italian. Participants had only taken one foreign language course in their higher education career, and only one foreign language course was required in their degree program. There were no expectations for participants to know or use a second language to be included in the study.

To prepare for the experience, participants engaged in three pre-departure meetings. Meeting one was an overview of the itinerary, travel expectations, and course requirements. Meeting two focused on understanding how to embrace and maneuver in the Italian culture. In the last pre-departure meeting, the research expectations and double-entry journaling were explained. Also, participants accessed training on the culture and history of Italy through the university Office of International Programs. This preparation consisted of participants completing a guided research questionnaire requiring them to search for answers and display their understanding of customs, cultural expectations, and history of Italy. All teacher candidates were enrolled in an online course and were assigned various research assignments focusing on the locations, history, culture, and early childhood instructional practices of educational institutions in Italy. For example, each candidate selected one of the early childhood institutions to be visited, accessed information about this institution via the internet, and created a brochure that was uploaded into a class discussion board. Members, through online discussion postings, engaged in conversation about each institution.

The Italian experience included visits to the following locations: Milan, Venice, Bologna, Florence, Tuscany, Siena, and Rome. Early childhood schools and other educational institutions visited were: Nuova Educazione (nursery and primary school), department of Università di Milano-Biocca, Rudolf Steiner Waldorf School, Loris Malaguzzi International Center (Reggio Emilia Approach), Federazione Associazioni di Docenti per l'Integrazione Scolastica (school of students with special needs), Kindergarten Firenze, International School of Florence, Sapienza Università di Roma and the Department of Educational Sciences, and Scuola Primaria Pubblica di Roma. Each institution or school visit lasted for about four hours. During this time, participants toured the facilities and listened to lectures delivered by institution faculty members concerning the educational philosophy of the institutions. When attending early childhood schools, teacher

candidates spent an hour or two with teachers and children in their classrooms. Many times, the teachers integrated the teacher candidates into class activities along with the children. At one institution, candidates viewed children rehearsing for an upcoming play. The play was entirely delivered in Italian and no translator was provided. So, candidates had to piece together what was happening only by the gestures and actions of children. When candidates attended Sapienza Università di Roma and the Department of Educational Sciences, they learned how future teachers were prepared in Italy and how different and similar teacher preparation was to their preparation in the United States. Also, participants visited cities and towns surrounding each institution. Expert, English-speaking tour guides provided overviews of each location enriching the experience with historical and cultural-related accounts. In each location, participants were provided time to walk, talk, and socialize with the locals.

Various qualitative data sources were used to determine themes and for credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Data included double-entry journal entries, transcribed focus group conversations, and PowerPoint presentation text. Double-entry journals were used as the holding place for the private reflections of teacher candidates, and this method was selected because double-entry journals guided candidates to reveal what was observed specifically and to think metacognitively as they responded to what was observed. For the 12 days of the trip, each participant was responsible for completing at least one entry each day. The double-entry journals utilized a two-column format. On the left side of each entry, participants noted observations (sights, sounds, thoughts), and on the right column, participants connected to or analyzed the information that was written on the left column ("Double-Entry Journals," 2000-2012). Researchers (one researcher for six participants) conducted a focus group the day before participants returned to the United States. Each researcher asked a series of prepared questions, and all responses were taped using a digital recorder. At the conclusion of the trip and as an assignment for their online university class, participants created PowerPoint presentations (one per member) as a reflection of the trip that included photos, videos, and text. Presentations were uploaded into their online course.

To analyze data, first, focus group data was transcribed, read, sorted, and coded according to emerging themes. As additional data from the journals and PowerPoint presentations were added to the focus group data, a rich picture of themes emerged. This thick description was a way to achieve transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Coded data and emerging themes were checked by each researcher to verify accuracy. Lincoln and Guba (1985) referred to this as member checking, and this process helped to establish credibility. Data analysis provided clear findings of how the Italian short-term study abroad experience affected teacher candidates.

## Findings

Much revealed was congruent with previous research. After data was analyzed, two themes emerged.

***Appreciation for the pedagogy taught in their university classrooms.*** As Raby (2008) espoused, the Italian experience was truly an opportunity for professional development for participants. Participants realized the child-centered, socially engaging, research-based pedagogy taught in their teacher preparation program had merit. The following quote is an example showing the importance of research-based instruction:

It was really refreshing to see that everything [implemented in the classrooms] was research-based. As long as we know our research and our theorists, we can tell them why they are [learning] it.

Participants witnessed how child-centered instruction was critical to student achievement in Italian early childhood schools. Through child-centered instruction, children in Italy exhibited they were self-sufficient, creative thinkers who valued the teacher and their learning (Brown, 2008). This quote from one of the participants indicated how she embraced the need for child-centered instruction:

Everything we have observed has been very student-centered. It is all based around the development of the child. They [Italian teachers] include more movement [in their teaching] and focus more on understanding. They touch, they smell, they paint; they use all the senses.

Data revealed participants understood that social interaction in Italian schools was important to the teaching of content. In each classroom, children were socially engaged with their peers and teacher. As participants noted in the data, teachers and children, in unison, participated in physical activity as they stood and chanted chorally to rehearse content. Participants noticed the classroom environment in most of the schools was family-like. In one of the schools, teachers moved from kindergarten to sixth grade with the same children so that they would “know” their children and not waste valuable learning time each year in learning about them. Social interaction and knowing your students was important.

Participants formed deeper understanding of content integration, a research-based strategy supported by the teacher preparation program of the participants. As Hinde (2005) revealed, student achievement is enhanced when teachers know how to integrate areas such as the arts with other content areas. Data analysis indicated participants were intrigued with how Italian art was integrated into day to day content. Italian students’ exhibited an understanding of and appreciation for the arts in their culture. One participant said, “Here in Italy, they [teachers] teach through art.” Another echoed, “They [Italian schools] have art, art, art in every school.” Art and music permeated instruction in Italian educational institutions. Children copied the art of the masters like Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, and Picasso and portrayed Roman historical accounts through elaborate plays. As one participant exclaimed, “They [Italian students] will be more creative in the end [because they understand artists and drama of the past and are allowed



to create]. Another crystalized her understanding of content integration through this comment:

I think you should teach different ways, and let students decide their way. To provide more emphasis on the arts in our classrooms, you can integrate [content areas like] math with art and music.

As participants embraced the pedagogy of child-centered, socially engaging, research-based instruction supported by their teacher preparation program, they realized that living in a global society required future teachers to embrace culturally responsive teaching.

***Urgency for culturally responsive teaching.*** Another theme discovered was the critical need for culturally responsive teaching. None of the participants had knowledge of the Italian language prior to the trip, but because Italians are expected to learn and speak English from an early age, participants had little difficulty navigating local schools and venues. Many Italians spoke at least some English, but there were times when participants were placed in situations where lecturers at the visited educational institutions were relaying information in Italian. Interpreters at each educational institution were used, but their skill in relaying content in English was hampered by their inability to communicate in English fluently, or their heavy Italian accent disrupted understanding. It was obvious to participants that most of the lecturers were not very skilled or lacked experience in using interpreters. The lecturers would speak for lengthy periods of time before allowing the interpreters to break in to relay in English what was said. Thus, lectures were hard to follow.

Also, participants displayed in the data that as they were touring different cities and towns on their free time, they could not fully portray to the locals their desires through verbal communication, but when they added gesturing to their speech, they were able relay their meaning. Teacher candidates learned to successfully maneuver in shops and restaurants by pointing to what they wanted and by utilizing Italian phrases they were integrating into their daily language. As participants found gesturing and short Italian phrases enhanced their verbal message, they understood what researchers such as Sime (2006) and Tissington and LaCour (2010) discovered. Gestures used skillfully complement the “co-occurring verbal message” (Sime, p. 224), and short phrases enhance comprehension (Tissington & LaCour). Examples of quotes from the data revealing participants’ journey to understanding what it was like to be a language learners follow:

We have been in English learners’ shoes. I think back on how frustrated I was [when I could not speak the language].

Another echoed this thought:

Until you experience it [not knowing a language] you do not know; it opened [not being able to understand the language] in how to communicate with others from another language; I thought I was empathetic and learned I was not.

Through emersion into settings where participants did not grasp the spoken language, not only did they gain empathy for language learners and increased intercultural sensitivity as Sleeter (2001), Wiest (2004), Tajes and Ortiz (2010), and Ritz (2011) revealed was an outcome of short-term study abroad, their empathy for what it was like to be a language learner was a springboard to consider implementing culturally responsive teaching strategies. When the candidates toured classrooms in Italy, they experienced how the teachers in the schools integrated them, non-Italian speakers, into the daily classroom activities through gesturing and realia (real objects). These types of experiences assisted the candidates in gaining an understanding of what culturally responsive teaching means and how to implement classroom strategies to meet the needs of language learners. This participant's statement acknowledged this self-confidence, "It is [culturally responsive teaching] not as scary as I thought it was going to be. We experienced what it is like to be a second language learner in the classroom."

As teacher candidates viewed how the teachers in Italy embraced the teaching of foreign languages and the study of other lands and their cultures, they learned valuable strategies to implement in their future classrooms that would assist students from other cultures. One example was mentioned time and time again in the data. In a fourth grade classroom in one of the schools, a foreign exchange teacher candidate from a university in the United States had previously completed his student teaching field experience in that classroom. In the halls outside of this fourth grade classroom was a map of the United States with a colored dot showing the present location of this student teacher. Also, pictures of the United States flag and other photos of locations in the United States were posted near the map. This teacher displayed how she and her students were honoring the culture of this former student teacher. One of the teacher candidates revealed what she had learned from seeing experiences such as this:

We can make them feel welcomed by learning about some of their language and saying some things in their language. I realized the importance of visuals, concrete objects, gesturing, and labeling in your classroom. You can incorporate other cultures into your teaching.

Ritz (2011) titled their self-confidence in implementing culturally-responsive teaching self-assurance. Teacher candidates were gaining confidence in teaching language learners and were connecting and valuing what they were taught in their teacher preparation program. The experience provided these candidates a manner to construct how important culturally responsive teaching is to language learners and helped them solidified what they were taught in their teacher preparation program about child-centered, research-based instruction.

## **Implications and Discussion**

Findings of this study offered critical insight for administrators of teacher preparation programs into how short-term study abroad experiences affect teacher candidates' intercultural sensitivity and how it deepens their knowledge and skill in culturally-responsive teaching strategies, but the short-term study abroad study was limited because it was a one-time experience of 24 teacher candidates in Italy. Further investigation of how short-term study abroad experiences affect teacher candidates in Italy and other countries is warranted. Additionally, follow-up study of how this experience affects these participants in their own future classrooms would add depth and understanding of the long-term effects of short-term study abroad.

Short-term study abroad experiences are avenues for applying what candidates have learned in their teacher preparation coursework and field experiences. These types of experiences allow participants to deepen their understanding of pedagogy designed to meet the needs of diverse learners. Terms like content integration, research-based pedagogy, child-centered instructional strategies, and constructivist philosophies become crystalized in their thinking.

Participants in short-term study abroad are thrown into situations where they must fend for themselves linguistically speaking. Although guided by experts and professors, they navigate their way through language barriers and learn to implement communication strategies to be understood. From these experiences, participants gain real empathy for what is to be a language learner in a foreign land. As teacher candidates gain empathy and view how teachers in another culture who embrace cultural differences practice their craft, they visualize how they will implement culturally responsive teaching strategies to enhance the learning of their future language learners. Culturally responsive teaching strategies are no longer unfamiliar and scary terms. Participants now have handles or pegs to hand knowledge gained in how to teach students from diverse cultures and languages.

Another implication of this short-term study abroad experience is that teacher preparation program administrators should seek ways to provide study abroad opportunities in order to prepare future teachers to become global members who embrace other cultures, other languages, and other ways of educating children. At a minimum, teacher preparation programs would benefit from offering courses that embrace the call for changing pedagogy in public schools to meet the needs of students who live in a global community. Language learners and cultural responsive teaching are not topics to be "covered" in courses; they are topics that must be deeply addressed and a part of field experiences where candidates work with teachers who on a daily basis understand and implement strategies to meet the needs of culturally diverse learners. Study abroad focusing on learning about and experiencing other cultures and languages should be a requirement for teacher candidates, not just provided as an opportunity.

Teacher preparation program leaders, deans, and department heads must heed Zanh's (2011) warning. If we do not provide teacher candidates with experiences to assist them in developing the dispositions, knowledge, and skills to become global citizens and do not foster their ability to prepare their future students to be active members of our global community, the position of the United States as a member of the world stage may be damaged. As supported by the findings of this study and the work of Orndorff (1998) and Chieffo and Griffiths (2004), short-term study abroad is a vehicle to encourage transformative change in the way teacher candidates perceive the world, other cultures, and the global society in which they live.

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## ***Preparing School Leaders for Special Education: Old Criticisms and New Directions***

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In the context of accountability and high-stakes testing, professors of educational administration in Texas and across the nation are under tremendous pressure to develop innovative principal preparation programs that produce effective school leaders, especially as research methodologies emerge to disaggregate the effects of such programs. One area few programs adequately address, including more innovative programs, is special education – despite the fact that principals struggle with accountability for all students, but particularly those principals in schools and districts with limited resources and limited professional development opportunities (Bays & Crocket, 2007; Wakeman, Browder, Flowers, & Ahlgrim-Delzell, 2006). Principals have long reported that their preparation programs did not prepare them with the legal and instructional knowledge in the area of special education (DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003; Hirth & Valesky, 1990).

However, as instructional leaders, principals have an important role to play in improving special education and supporting students with disabilities. Principals with special education knowledge and expertise employ a range of instructional leadership and managerial actions to improve special education programs and educational outcomes for students with disabilities (Waldron, McLesky, & Redd, 2011; Walther-Thomas & DiPaola, 2003). Many principals without this knowledge either learn on the job or continue to be unable to meet the needs of students with disabilities. Unfortunately, many principals are unable to sufficiently learn on the job and frequently delegate these responsibilities away (Lashley, 2007), making it no surprise that students with disabilities struggle to find academic success.

In Texas, an analysis of student achievement in special education reveals persistent gaps between students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers; general education students were also far more likely to be proficient on state mandated reading and mathematics assessments. Statewide, 88 percent of all students were proficient in reading while only 67 percent of students with disabilities were proficient (TEA, 2013). In mathematics, the gap was wider: 83 percent of all students scored proficient while only 63 percent of students with disabilities met the same level of proficiency (TEA, 2013).

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Within urban districts, the achievement gap in reading is just as disturbing: Austin ISD, 26%; Dallas ISD, 25%; El Paso ISD, 21%; Houston ISD: 26%; San Antonio ISD: 19% (TEA, 2012). Principals in Texas are also forced to reform special education programs with fewer special education teachers than their peers in other states. In Texas schools, there are only 4.7 special education teachers for every 100 students with disabilities, while the national average was 6.67 (USDOE, 2009). The end result is that only 27.4 percent of students with disabilities graduated with high school diplomas in the state of Texas (USDOE, 2009).

Of course, university-based principal preparation programs are not fully to blame for the shortcomings of schools. Principals, teachers, superintendents, and other stakeholders play an important role in ensuring that students with disabilities receive an equitable educational experience and achieve important educational outcomes. However, university-based principal preparation programs can and should take action to further develop the skills and expertise of current students so that they will be better equipped to lead in the area of special education. While principal preparation programs, in general, have been the subject of much debate (Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012), a subset of articles and book chapters has also emerged on the importance of special education in particular. In what follows, we present a review of the latter, after first situating it within a critical discussion of the former. In the final section, we offer practical recommendations for enhancing principal preparation programs, with an emphasis on preparation to lead in the area of special education.

### **University-Based Preparation Programs**

In preparing this article, we reviewed literature related, both, to principal preparation programs and to research on principals' experiences and beliefs about their preparedness to lead for students with disabilities. In so doing, four interrelated concerns emerged in relation to principal preparation programs: (a) outdated coursework; (b) misalignment between theory and practice; (c) faculty inexperience; and (d) ineffective clinical experiences. Other researchers have highlighted similar concerns (Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, & Orr, 2007; Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012), but have not sought to explicitly connect these concerns to special education. This should not come as a surprise, as many programs – innovative or outdated – have a broad focus rather than a more integrated focus on different subject areas, grade levels, or student populations (Lochmiller, Huggins, & Acker-Hocevar, 2012). Of particular relevance to this discussion is how special education has been almost completely ignored in programs (Cusson, 2010; Davidson & Algozzine, 2002), typically finding its way into programs during one or two course weeks of a semester-long school law course. In our discussion of each of the above-mentioned issues, we begin by summarizing criticism from the literature reviewed and then consider ways to improve principal preparation, both generally and with regard to special education specifically.



**Coursework.** A majority of programs still consist of a basic compilation of coursework which covers management, school laws, and other broad educational topics, with little attention paid to effective teaching and organizational change (Björk, Kowalski, & Browne-Ferrigno, 2005). In a study of university-based principal preparation programs at major U.S. universities, Hess and Kelly (2007) found that only 2 percent of course weeks addressed issues related to accountability in the context of school management or improvement. The Southern Regional Education Board (2006), for example, found that most programs did not extend much beyond a set of outdated courses that focused on school administration and management. In a review of 28 university programs, Levine (2005) described the programs as “little more than a grab-bag of survey courses” (p. 28). Even at elite universities, principal preparation programs have been criticized for being out of sync with the job requirements of the principalship (Tucker & Coddling, 2002).

Previously, the field of educational administration may not have been ready to respond with new or revised courses and programs when critics of principal preparation began heated arguments. However, the field has made tremendous progress. Some professors of educational administration and special education are now focusing their research efforts on understanding principal leadership in special education, and, in doing so, have identified a number of practices that contribute to greater equity and achievement for students with disabilities (Boscardin, Mainzer, & Kealy, 2011). Separately, between 2008 and 2009, the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) developed standards for special education administrators and the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) revised leadership development standards to further incorporate special education.

These initiatives – along with increased efforts to research the role principals play in supporting students with disabilities and the field’s vigorous focus on social justice leadership – provide a solid foundation for the reform of programs, and research has found that even limited exposure to special education issues through coursework improves new principals comfort level in dealing with special education (Angelle & Bilton, 2009). To that end, departments of educational leadership, with the support of their colleges of education and other departments, have the opportunity, at the present juncture, to engage with emerging research, revised standards, and social justice principles to revise program missions, course descriptions and offerings, and expectations and requirements for student acceptance and graduation. Department chairs have the opportunity to establish interdisciplinary faculty teams that include professors of educational administration, special education, teaching, and others, to begin to review and reformulate coursework, as well as to potentially co-teach courses. These teams might consider consulting and/or conducting a comprehensive literature review of research focused on how principals create more inclusive schools for students with disabilities and more recent survey research associated with principal preparation in special education. After analyzing this literature and coming to meaningful conclusions about what tools and knowledge principals need to be successful with special education, these teams should review current professional standards (ISLLC standards, CEC

standards, and Texas Examinations of Educator Standards [TExES]) to further detail how each course in the program can provide students with the necessary instruction, experiences, learning opportunities, and critical expertise to be successful in special education. Since reform is needed in most universities across the state and nation, professors across universities should ensure that they share their efforts through collaboration, professional journals, associations, and conferences.

Although a complete discussion of these steps is beyond the scope of the present article, a few of the more urgent actions would be to: (a) infuse dialogue related to social justice and marginalization of students with disabilities into coursework; (b) incorporate CEC standards into core courses; and (c) expand the emphasis of special education in school law courses. These actions would help to ensure program graduates recognize inequities, are aware of some of the actions they can take to create more equitable schools, and be prepared to handle legal challenges that may occur as a result of their reform efforts. The next section further elaborates on how coursework can be improved.

***Aligning Theory and Practice.*** In a review of preparation research, Darling-Hammond and colleagues (2007) found that coursework often “fails to link theory with practice, is overly didactic, is out of touch with the real-world complexities and demands of school leadership, and is not aligned with established theories of leadership” (p. 5). Acker-Hocevar and Cruz-Janzen (2008) identified specific skills and knowledge of effective leaders working in historically low-performing urban schools. In this study, effective leaders were accustomed to working in teams, talking openly, problem-solving, sharing ideas and resources, and understanding their role on a team. However, when the researchers reviewed the principal preparation programs in the same region, the skills employed by effective leaders were not emphasized. Acker-Hocevar and Janzen-Cruz (2008) concluded that programs needed to be built “‘from the ground up,’ through the realities of those in the trenches – away from traditional theoretical role definitions and with better connections to the actual tasks performed at these schools and the skills and knowledge that enable them to be successful” (p. 93).

To continue, principals require specific expertise and a variety of skills to provide effective leadership in special education. For example, principals need the skills: (a) to revise budgets and master schedules; (b) to ensure special education teachers and general education teachers have time to meet, plan, and teach together; (c) to provide appropriate resources and training so all teachers are able to differentiate instruction; (d) to monitor the quality of IEPs, progress reports, and other assessments; and (e) to manage special education teachers’ time to ensure their work is legally in compliance (Billingsley, 2012; Billingsley, Carlson, & Klein, 2004). Principals must also be knowledgeable and ready to respond to unique and complex challenges in a way that is in sync with the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act, Texas Education Agency (TEA) policy, and school district policy. Additionally, principals need in-depth knowledge about effective instructional practices and assessments techniques in the area of special education to

ensure students are receiving the appropriate supports and are placed in the appropriate educational environment (Pazey & Cole, 2013).

University faculty, with or without school leadership experience, may find it difficult to develop courses grounded in theory while at the same time providing practical knowledge and learning experiences, but a few steps can be taken to further the alignment between theory and practice. First, program faculty could shift from the role of “professor as lecturer” to the role of “professor as facilitator,” since each faculty member has their own strengths and weaknesses and cannot be an expert in all things leadership. Coursework and other learning experiences should enable students to share ideas, examples, and best practices while learning assessments tools – such as a school wide professional development plan, student directed professional development sessions, or school budget projects – should incorporate the policies and practices at each student’s school district. Second, where it does not already exist, a strong partnership between the university department and local school district is important because it would create an opportunity for more situated and practical assessments. Third, if partnerships are not available, faculty might consider having their students interview principals and then apply what they learned to their own projects and assignments.

These recommendations have important implications for providing opportunities to incorporate special education into principal preparation programs. While theories of instructional leadership or other leadership theories can remain a central part of courses, special education should be used as a point of reference for engaging in such theories. For example, course assignments could include student reflections on Individualized Educational Program (IEP) meetings; sharing, modeling, or critiquing co-taught/co-planned lessons; or student presentations (based on principal interviews they conducted) on the leadership challenges or legal aspects associated with special education. Another example could be calling upon faculty members in a college of education’s special education department to serve as the expert in special education for the principal preparation program, presenting particular topics to program students. Some issues that could be discussed include: (a) differentiated instruction; (b) using data to drive instruction or response to intervention systems; (c) assessment and eligibility for special education; (d) identifying appropriate transition services; (e) disability classifications and how to best serve students with diverse needs; and (f) other student generated questions. Lastly, professors of educational administration are often aware of effective principals or district administrators from whom students can learn through guest speaking opportunities, which would provide an additional point to connect theory to practice

**Faculty Experience.** A number of scholars have brought attention to the fact that a significant proportion of faculty lack school leadership experience all together (Darling-Hammond, et al., 2007; Murphy, 2007; Pounder, Crow, & Bergerson, 2004). National surveys of education administration faculty revealed that only about one-third of professors of educational administration have school leadership experience (McCarthy & Kuh, 1997; Murphy, 2007); and, for our purposes, it is reasonable to expect that – among

those with school leadership experience – very few will have had experience with special education. Given that only about 35 percent of new faculty teaching in preparation programs had school leadership experience (Pounder, Crow, & Bergerson, 2004), there is reason to believe that candidates in principal preparation programs will continue to be directed and instructed by faculty without practical experience on which to draw. Even more troubling is the high rate of adjunct faculty utilized in principal preparation programs. The National Center for Education Statistics (2004) reported that 64 percent of faculty in preparation programs were adjuncts.

An ideal response to this situation would be to ensure that principal preparation programs have more faculty with direct school leadership experience. However, in view of the current hiring preferences of university departments – wherein publications are weighted more than successful, first-hand leadership experience – we are unlikely to witness such a response. Consequently, program innovation and the sharing of resources become even more important. Problem-based learning through case studies is a method professors can use to foster a greater alignment between theory and practice. *The Journal of Cases in Educational Leadership* is one example of a teaching resource that provides cases rooted in practical problems. Professors of educational administration will be able to present real-world, relevant school leadership challenges while also utilizing theory to help develop practical and relevant learning experiences. In Texas, professors could enhance the accessibility of teaching cases through the creation of a similar journal specific to school leadership in Texas. This type of research and publication process could enable professors to enhance their ability to instruct a diverse range of students working in a diverse range of school settings but all under the policies and guidelines of the Texas Education Agency (TEA).

**Clinical Experiences.** The implementation of clinical experiences has been found to vary across programs. For example, internships in many principal preparation programs are underdeveloped, unsupervised, or lack meaningful experiences (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007). Levine (2005) found that internship and other clinical experiences were squeezed into student schedules and described as “something to be gotten out of the way, not as a learning opportunity” (p. 40). Such internships can lack hands-on leadership experience and place students in the role of being a passive observer or perhaps make them an additional school resource to complete administrative paperwork (Cunningham & Sherman, 2008; Fry, Bottom, & O’Neill, 2005). Where this is the case, these experiences do not enable students to grow in meaningful ways. Some principal preparation programs utilize student portfolios to enable students to document and reflect on their experiences and learning. However, in many instances, students complete leadership portfolios without ongoing supervision from both faculty and assigned mentors (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007). With regard to special education, a survey of 553 current principals found no statistically significant relationship between the comfort levels of principal candidates with special education and a range of internship requirements (Angelle & Bilton, 2009).

Some reforms which could improve clinical experiences are simple and straightforward. To begin, where not already the case, faculty should actively supervise interns, clearly communicate expectations with mentors, and establish meaningful relationships with district administrators to ensure interns have access to a variety of experiences relevant to their preparation as educational leaders. However, programs can also identify new experiences or develop experiential learning projects to further enhance programs. For example, students could conduct in-depth interviews with seasoned practitioners in order to learn from others' firsthand perspective about leadership challenges, educational management issues, school-community interaction, ways to prevent burnout, and policy implementation, among other topics (Oplatka, 2009). Students could also engage in participatory action research projects to gain experience with organizational change processes and the obstacles to them (Sappington, Baker, Gardner, & Pacha, 2010). These experiences can be arranged, facilitated, and supervised by professors to help students become reflective of their own knowledge, skills, and potential areas in need of growth. Much of this work can be done collaboratively, as many programs employ a cohort system which provides a community setting to share experiences, conduct peer review, and build meaningful relationships that will be useful when candidates move into school leadership roles after the completion of their programs (Burke, Marx, & Lowenstein, 2012; Leithwood, Jantzi, Coffin, & Wilson, 1996).

Effective internships and clinical learning experiences must be carefully planned and require both faculty and mentor oversight as well as activities that help students understand, develop, and reflect on school leadership. Topics associated with special education and students with disabilities can be easily integrated into well-developed programs. First, internships and other clinical learning experiences can be co-developed with faculty, students, or program graduates with expertise in the area of special education. Potential learning experiences might include: (a) attending due process complaint hearings, (b) interviewing a school district attorney who handles special education issues, (c) observing IEP meetings and then discussing them with the meeting's chair, (d) conducting focus groups with special education teachers to better understand instructional and behavioral challenges, or (e) working with a school psychologist to better understand the IEP eligibility process, assessment instruments, and how data should be used to drive decisions in the area of special education.

## **Conclusions**

The quality of principal preparation programs has been criticized for years, and professors of educational administration and their colleagues from other disciplines have responded with new research and professional standards that can be used to enhance preparation for special education leadership. It is certainly the case that pockets of innovation exist, though research suggests that they are outliers rather than reflective of national change. Thus, we have suggested here that faculty working in educational leadership departments should invest time and effort to review and revise their programs. Overall, program development should be collaborative and should allow for input and

support from neighboring school districts, program graduates, students, and faculty in other departments, especially special education. Theory and practice should be integrated throughout learning experiences – both coursework and clinical field experiences – in order to provide opportunities for students to observe, practice, and reflect on leadership. Issues related to special education and students with disabilities must be thoughtfully weaved through these experiences.

To that end, it should be noted that special education is highly localized because state education agencies and school districts create policies and standard operating procedures to implement IDEA. Professors of educational administration must remember that their program graduates will confront policies from their school districts, regional education service centers, state education agencies, and the U.S. Department of Education, along with state and federal court decisions. In addition, program graduates working in different school districts throughout the state of Texas will confront numerous challenges associated to the continuum of available placements, resources, and professional support. Moreover, each graduate will work in a unique community context with different demographics. This means programs must be flexible and professors should engage with students as facilitators, and not solely as lecturers.

If universities in Texas and across the nation truly seek to prepare principals who are ready to lead in the era of accountability and in the area of special education, programs must provide quality training and learning experiences while at the same time enabling students to recognize and wrestle with the contextual policies and practices that are unique to their local community. The persistent achievement gap between students with and without disabilities is not a Texas problem; it's a national problem. Professors of educational administration in the state of Texas have the opportunity to set the bar for how to develop innovative principal preparation programs that enable students to be competent leaders, both generally and in special education.

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